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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 9035
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3988
RUEHKP/AMCONSUL KARACHI PRIORITY 0564
RUEHLH/AMCONSUL LAHORE PRIORITY 6298
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
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SUBJECT: TWO PAKISTANI ULEMA GROUPS CONDEMN SUICIDE BOMBINGS

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary: However haltingly, the GOP has begun work on its own strategic information campaign to convince civil society to take ownership of the fight against extremism. The pro-secular Pakistan People's Party recognizes it must bring the religious right, which thrives on anti-Americanism, on board if it hopes to change public attitudes. They may be making some progress. Two groups of Pakistani Islamic scholars recently condemned the suicide bombings in Pakistan as un-Islamic. Interior Minister Rehman Malik, who likely prodded at least one of the groups into action, welcomed the comments and expressed his hope the statements would discourage further suicide attacks; President Zardari has invited the imam of the Kabaa in Mecca to preach his message of moderation at Islamabad's Faisal Mosque. The ulema's condemnations were laced with the requisite jabs at U.S. and GOP policy but were a welcome sign that Pakistanis have begun to push back on militants who kill fellow Muslims. End summary.

¶2. (U) On October 14, in Lahore, the Muttahida Ulema Council (MUC) - an umbrella organization comprised of scholars from a variety of Muslim denominations - issued an edict declaring suicide bombings haram, or forbidden within Islam. That message was tempered by statements blaming the GOP and the U.S. for fostering a conspiracy against Pakistan. Hafiz Saeed, the leader of the Jamaat-ud-Dawa, considered the parent organization of the Lashkar-e-Taiba, was also present at the October 14 meeting. The MUC is not a permanent forum, but rather meets periodically to engender member consensus on national issues.

¶3. (C) On October 15, at its inaugural meeting in Lahore, the Muttahida Ulema Board of Punjab (MUBP) also issued a declaration condemning suicide bombings and calling on the GOP to rectify "the root causes of terrorism." The MUPB is subordinate to the Muttahida Ulema Council and works with the GOP on issues concerning controversial religious publications.

¶4. (U) Similar previous efforts have resulted in retaliation by extremist groups. The Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI-F) political party convened an ulema convention and issued a similar edict on April 16, 2007. In response, Maulana Hassan Jan, a prominent signatory of that declaration, was murdered by unknown gunmen in September 2007. His death caused a chilling effect within the religious community as many leaders refused to pursue the enforcement of the edict or speak out against the taliban.

¶5. (C) With the election of a civilian government resolved

to combat a growing string of suicide bombings aimed at Pakistanis, however, it appears that some Islamic scholars are now more willing to confront the taliban. Behind the scenes, Interior Minister Malik and Information Minister Rehman have been meeting with groups of scholars and media representatives to press civil society to take ownership of the fight against extremism. President Zardari has asked the imam of the Kabaa in Mecca to repeat his extremely popular 2007 sermon touting moderate Islam at Islamabad's Faisal Mosque; Zardari wants to distribute CD copies of the sermon widely across Pakistan.

16. (C) Comment: The pro-secular Pakistan People's Party knows it has to bring the religious right, which thrives on anti-Americanism, on board if it is to convince the public to take ownership of the fight against militants. It is dropping "war on terror" phraseology associated with the U.S. and, during recent parliamentary debates, focused on how un-Islamic militant actions have become. No one expects the recent ulema condemnations to change militant policy, but they are a welcome sign the GOP and Pakistan's civil society are pushing back on militants who kill fellow Muslims.
PATTERSON